

THE MINOR PROPHETS

MALACHI

Cory Holas

Author: Written by Malachi, a prophet from the Old Testament prophet, who ministered to the restored house of Judah. In the Hebrew form Malachi means 'My messenger' or 'Messenger of Jehovah'. Additionally, the phrases 'the messenger of the Lord of Hosts' and 'the messenger of the covenant' are also related to the name Malachi.

Year: Malachi's ministry covered a period of about 25 years from 435-410 BC. It was during the governorship of Nehemiah over the restored house of Judah.

Key Scripture: Malachi 3:1-3, 3:9, 3:10,

Key Points:

- His message was to the people, who were living in Jerusalem for some time now and things weren't going well. Similar messages found in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.
- It was 100 years after their return from exile in Babylon.
- The people's hopes were high after coming out of exile; they planned to rebuild the temple, restore their lives and were expecting all the promises of the great prophets to come true and the messiah would come and set-up a unified nation over Israel and bring justice and peace for all. But the Israelites who repopulated the city proved to be just as unfaithful to God as their ancestors. Resulting in corruption, poverty and injustice.
- It was the last time God spoke to Judah for 400 years. They were left in silence because of how they treated God.

Themes: God speaks through Malachi to the people of Judah on three themes.

Past survival: (Chpt 1:1-5)

Jacob - Israel – Loved – Preserved

Esau - Edom - Hated - Destroyed

Present sins: (Chpt 1:6-Chpt 3:15)

-Priests sinning: cheap sacrifices and popular sermons:

-People sinning: Doubting God, slanderous speech, mixed marriages, heartless divorces, unpaid tithes.

Future separation: (Chpt 3:16-Chpt 4:6)

-Right choice: Righteous – healing in the sun

Wicked – burning in the fire

About The Book Of Micah

The book of Malachi can be likened to our spiritual health. It requires constant maintenance; otherwise we quickly lapse into apathy and insincerity. This was a specific problem in Malachi's time. After returning from exile in Babylon, the Jews rebuilt the Temple and reinstated the priesthood. Everything seemed to be going well, but after a few generations passed, many Jews became complacent in their faith. Even the priests became corrupt and careless in carrying out their duties. So Malachi, prophesied against the people's insincere worship, their refusal to tithe the full amount and their lack of concern for God's commands. He did not just condemn them for their failures, however; he also promised them great blessings for their obedience. Malachi also foretold the coming of Elijah, who would prepare the way for the great "day of the Lord", by this he was referring to John the Baptist.

Four Unique Features About The Book Of Malachi

1. There is more of God's speech in Malachi, than any of the other prophetic books.
2. This prophecy from Malachi is anonymous. Most people think that 'Malachi' is the name of the author, but it's not actually a name at all. It simply means 'messenger'.
3. Malachi is unusual in that he is the one prophet who had dialogues with people. It is clear that he spoke to prophecy and was heckled, because he reports the responses and the heckling.
4. The book of Malachi is recorded in the style of a conversation or short exchanges or disputes. God makes a claim, the people respond and then God has the final word. By this point God is exhausted and his feelings have dried up and therefore doesn't speak to them for another 400 years.

Breakdown Of Chapters

Chapter 1 (1-5): To understand the first part of the book we must go back 1,500 years to Jacob and Esau. In short God cared for Jacob more than he did for Esau. But God was not just talking about Jacob and Esau but about the two nations of Israel and Edom. He's reminding them that over the previous 100 years, he has done nothing but good for Israel and has punished Edom. When the Babylonians came to take the Jews into exile, the Edomites (the descendants of Esau) were delighted and joined in the horrific destruction. Since that day Edom had been under God's judgement. Malachi is asking the Judeans to think about their survival in comparison to Edom and to be grateful to God.

Malachi see's God in three functions:

- God is the creator of our past
- The king of our present
- The judge of our future

Chapter 2 (1:6 – 2:9): The first people whom Malachi speaks out against are the priests. God is seen as Father and as Master and should be respected. Instead they were treating God with contempt. The services were conducted in a casual and careless manner, as if anything would do for God. Here he tells the priests that they are treating God with familiarity rather than with reverence and respect and gives two examples:

1. Cheap Sacrifices - Instead of choosing their best lamb, they were choosing the worst to offer to God.
2. Popular sermons - He condemns the priests for telling the people what they want to hear rather than teaching them the law.

Malachi turns his attention to the people and shares five things, which showed that both their belief and behaviour were slipping.

1. Mixed marriages – Young people were marrying outside of the people of God and following the worship of idols.
2. Divorce – God doesn't like divorce and this was going against his plan for his people.
3. Doubtful questions – Malachi told the people that God came to punish bad people and that he would start with his temple. The people began to accuse God of being unfair. At this point it's as if God's tone changes and he speaks from the heart.

Malachi 3:6-7 *"I am the Lord, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed. Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies.*

4. Unpaid tithes – Next Malachi tells them that they are stealing from God.
5. Slandorous talk – Malachi said that it was the way they had belittled the service of God, claiming that there was no point because even evildoers prospered.

'When people question the purpose of bothering about God, it's not long before they stop bothering to be godly. Or to put it more simply, when one generation is asking 'why bother about God' the next generation will be asking 'why be good' – David Pawson

Chapter 3 (3:16-4:6): In the final part of chapter three Malachi outlines a separation amongst the people of Israel. On that day there will only be two groups; those who serve God and those who don't. One is a picture of righteousness and the other is a picture of those who have not responded to God.

Chapter 4 (4:4-6): The book concludes, focussing on two of the greatest men in the Old Testament – Moses and Elijah. This is God's last word for 400 years, before the opening of the new. God calls the people to remember Moses and return to the law and Malachi finishes by saying that God will give them another chance. All that Malachi promised, came to pass.

How Do We Apply This To Our Lives?

In 1 Corinthians 10, we are told that these Old Testament examples are written for the use of Christians today.

1 Corinthians 10:6-11 - *These things happened as a warning to us, so that we would not crave evil things as they did, or worship idols as some of them did...These things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who live at the end of the age.*

- a) What happened to the Jewish nation can easily happen to us. It is a timeless reminder that we must be on guard and constantly work on our relationship with God.
Psalm 139: 23 - *Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.*
- b) The New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament and the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament. We are not under the Sabbath law or need to sacrifice of animals but we are under the law of Christ.
James 1:25 - *But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.*
- c) We must not exploit God's grace.
Romans 6:1-2 - *Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? ² Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?*

- d) We must remember that judgement begins at the house of God.
1 Peter 4:17 - *For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God's Good News?*

Can You See Jesus In The Book?

There isn't any specific clear mention of Jesus in the book, however there are some hints that point to Jesus.

Malachi 3:1-3: *"Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the Lord.*

Christ is seen as the messenger and of the new covenant, the refiner and purifier of his people and the cleanser of the temple. It's a messianic promise point to coming of Jesus.

In Malachi 3:16-18, Malachi speaks of a time when any indifferences, about whether people thought something was wrong or right to do, will no longer be the case, for it will be clear to see those who fear the Lord and who truly serve God.

John 14:6 *"No one comes to the father except through me". So whether or not a person is found in Christ, would be a reflection of how they conduct themselves, it would be a test on the order of which Malachi spoke.*

In the final chapter Malachi, speaks of the coming righteousness that marks the kingdom of God, pointing to the righteousness of Jesus. Malachi 4:2 - *"But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings".*

Conclusion

Malachi's message contrasts the faithfulness of the Lord and the faithlessness of Israel. The Lord had always loved Israel, still loved Israel and will always love his people. In return, the Lord expected the honour due to a father from a child. The Israelites had failed to honour God, choosing instead to participate in disrespectful worship practices and to oppress their fellow Israelites. The Lord would deal with these issues by judging the guilty and blessing the repentant. He would purify his people, removing those who persisted in disobedience and leaving behind a righteous remnant. While animal sacrifices and tithes are concerns more of the old testament than of the new testament, the principle of bringing the best to the Lord still abides. Honour and respect are still due to the Lord and he still desires that those who worship him do so by dedicating themselves entirely to him.

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